Contra Costa County Historical Society

BULLETIN

POST OFFICE BOX 190 FEBRUARY 1, 1971 MARTINEZ, CALIFORNIA

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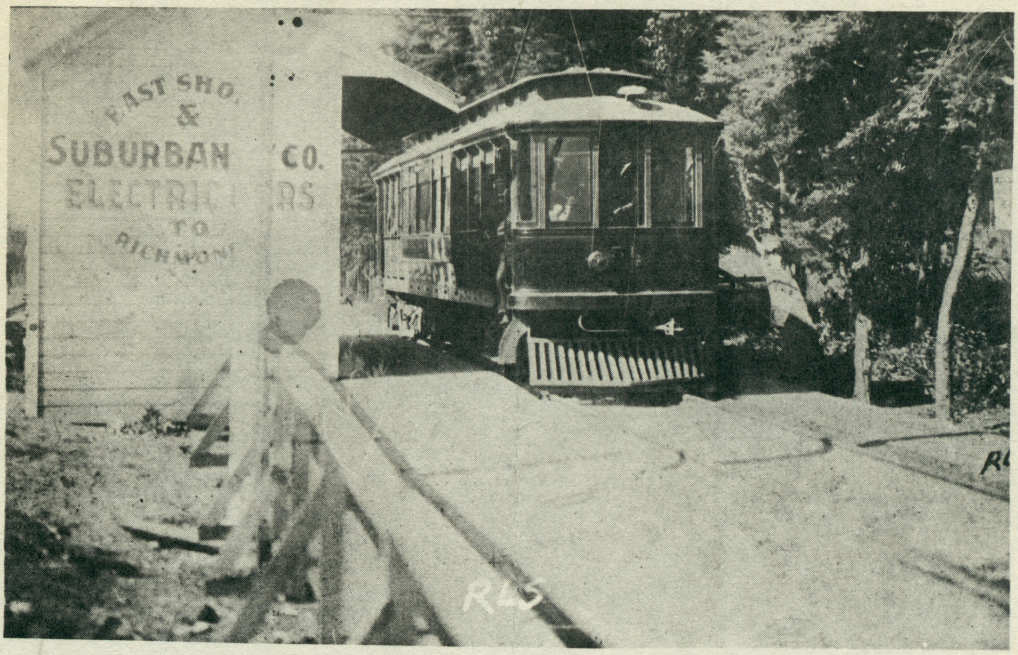
Trio of Historical Societies to Hear Story of Early East Bay Rail Lines



An Eastshore & Suburban car stops at the Alameda-Contra Costa county line in 1910.

How the first wheels of the iron horse and the electric cars made history in western Contra Costa County will be told at a joint meeting of the Contra Costa County Historical Society, the San Pablo Historical Society and the Richmond Museum, convening in El Cerrito, Wednesday night, February 17, 1971.

Louis L. Stein, one of the Bay Area's acknowledged authorities on early-day railroading will be the guest speaker.

He will tell the story of the founding of western County's first rail service in the late nineteenth century and the dramatic impact that the steam choo-choo and the electric clang-clang had on the social and economic life of the horse-and-buggy era.

The gathering is officially designated as the Annual Meeting of the Contra Costa society, and President A. Frank Bray is expected to announce results of the voting for five members of the board of directors. A ballot accompanies copies of this issue of the Bulletin mailed to members.

The joint meeting will be held at the Cerrito Club. It was last the site of a County society meeting in September, 1967, held to observe El Cerrito's Golden Anniversary.

Mr. Stein's talk will be illustrated with a selected group of slide pictures from his

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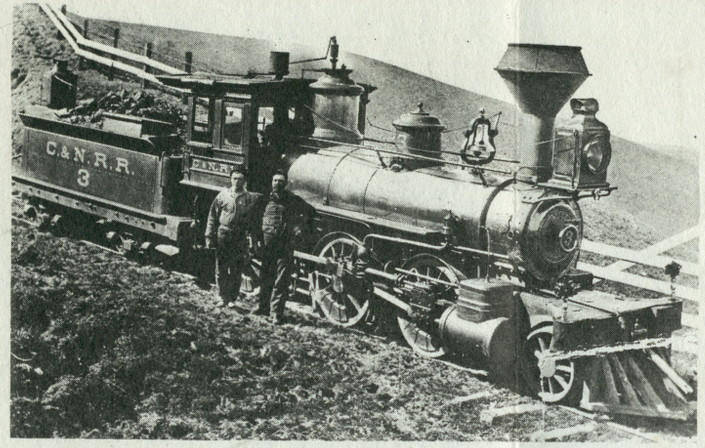
Steam and Electric Power Spelled the End of Animal Power



Nostalgia on Tewksbury Hill, San Pablo. Note potted flowers above cow catcher of this California & Nevada steam engine.

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extensive collection of railroadiana. They will recall the first steamcars in the County, run by the Northern Railway. The line was built in 1876 from Oakland to Martinez by the Central Pacific Railroad. Way stations were at Stege, Barrett Avenue in Richmond, San Pablo, Pinole, Rodeo, Tormey and Crockett.

In 1878 the line was extended from Martinez to Tracy, and was called the San Pablo & Tulare Railroad. The next year the Central Pacific built the famous huge railroad ferry from Port Costa to Benicia, which shortened its transcontinental service by some 40 miles.

Another western County rail line, which sparks the memory of some senior citizens old enough to have ridden it, was the short-lived, wood-burning California & Nevada Railroad. It afforded an unreliable, weather-permitting service, by 1891, between Emeryville and Orinda. But picnickers loved it, despite its uncertain schedule, for it was a delightful way to go on a Sunday outing to any of several wonderful recreation spots along San Pablo Creek.

The pioneer of strictly local transit was the now-forgotten East Shore and Suburban Railroad. It operated a streetcar system from the town of Rust (today's El Cerrito) on the Alameda County line to the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, with several branch lines shooting off. These were the days — in about 1906 — when a joint or through fare was unheard of. An Oakland passenger bound for Point Richmond had to buy three tickets, one at Oakland, one at Rust and one at the Richmond subway near the depot.

HOW TO GET TO THE MEETING

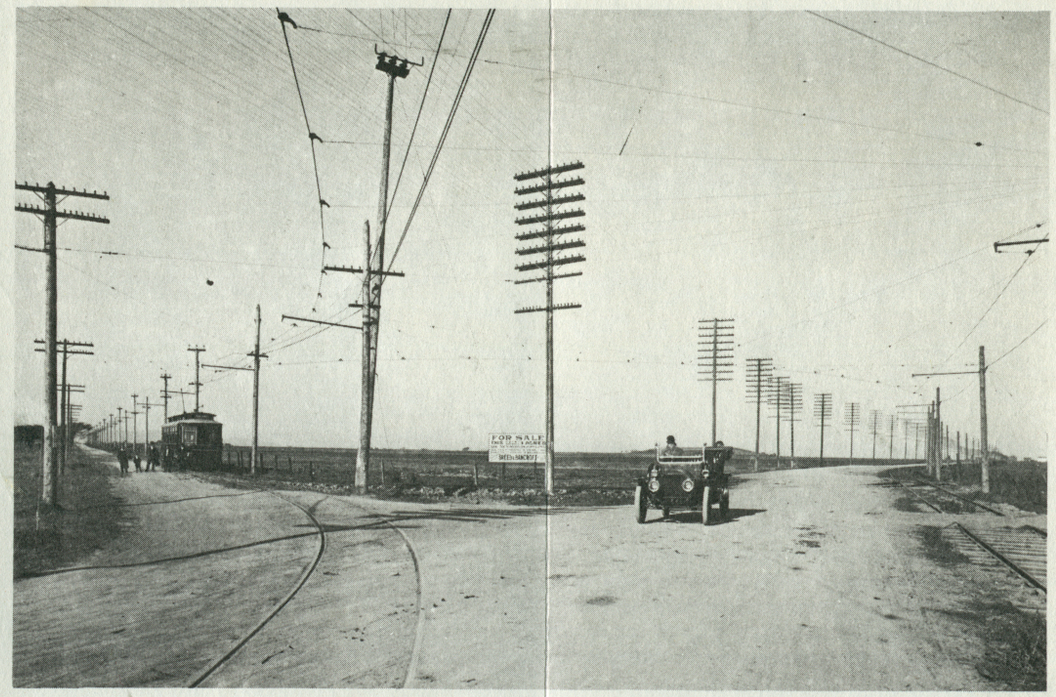
Driving on the Eastshore Freeway from Berkeley and Oakland, take the Potrero turn-off, and drive east on Potrero to Kearney.

Driving via the Eastshore Freeway from north of El Cerrito, take Cutting Blvd. off-ramp, left on Cutting Blvd. to San Pablo Ave., right (south) on San Pablo to Potrero, then left (east) to Kearney Street.

The Cerrito Club is at Potrero and Kearney.

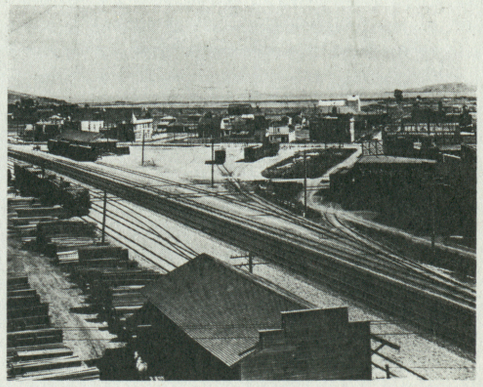
Today's air-conditioned, power-steering motorist has to execute a mental backflip to appreciate the dependence of his forbears on the ding-dongs and clickety-clacks of bygone years. Most people at the turn of the century had to rely on horsepower fueled by hay and oats. Riding the steam or electric cars was a lark and a luxury (roundtrip to Orinda, 75 cents). For some it became a necessity. Standard Oil workers depended upon local transit to such an extent that at one time the streetcars towed trailers with extra seating capacity.

The El Cerrito meeting will recreate this era for young and old alike, an exercise in nostalgia, a lesson in history.



Who remembers San Pablo Avenue and Macdonald Avenue, Richmond, when it looked like this — in 1912? That was a time when most people would see it from an electric clang-clang, not a luxurious private touring car.

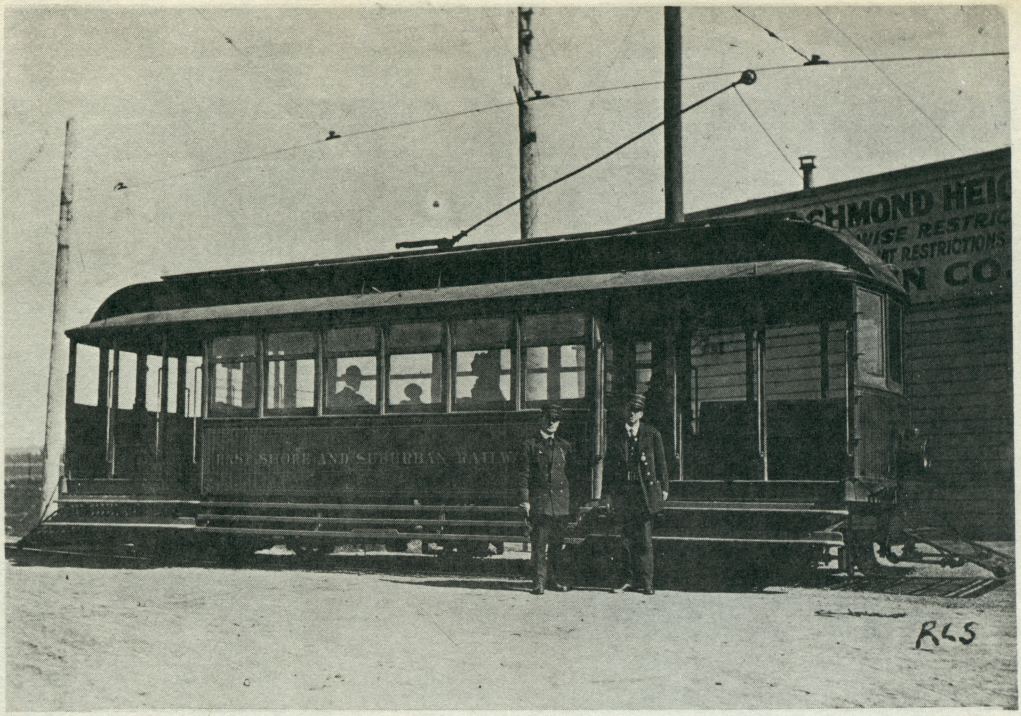
A rare view of the Southern Pacific depot in a forgotten era. Easter Hill in the background.



THE SPEAKER

To many persons and organizations Louis L. Stein is a walking encyclopedia of East Bay history. For the past 25 years he has assembled a large collection of books, ephemera, photos and artifacts connected with yesteryear's families and farms, cities and towns, institutions and people. He has shared these and his broad knowledge of the East Bay's historical past with thousands of persons, via loan and gift, and by speaking to numerous organizations.

Mr. Stein is the first vice president of the Contra Costa County Historical Society; a director and life member of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society; a director of the Oakland Museum and of the Alameda County Historical Society; and a member of the California Historical Society. He is a Past Noble Grand Humbug of E. Clampus Vitus.



This was the northeast corner of 23rd and Macdonald in Richmond, back in the days of the quaint, open-end streetcars.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MEMBERSHIP MEETING

DINNER & PROGRAM

Speaker: Louis L. Stein

Date: February 17, 1971

Place: Cerrito Club
Potrero and Kearney
El Cerrito

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Dinner: $4.50

Reservations: To J. B. Jory, Sect'y
P.O. Box 190
Martinez, CA 94554

COME ONE! COME ALL!